

Book Reviews

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THAT'S INCURABLE—George Thomas, MD, and Lee Schreiner, MD. Penguin Books, 625 Madison Avenue, New York, NY, 1984. 154 pages, \$5.95 (softcover).

As a subject, lethal midline granuloma may well be expected to appear only in textbooks of medicine or to be used on ward rounds by over-zealous residents faced with awe-struck medical students. One does not, however, expect it to appear in a humorous book. In fact, it may seem difficult to imagine how such a topic could even remotely be considered funny. Enter Dr Thomas and Dr Schreiner, pseudonyms for two Harvard physicians who have picked lethal midline granuloma among several horrendous diseases for inclusion in an irreverent and at times hilarious look at modern medicine.

In this book, primarily aimed at the lay public, they tackle a cadre of human maladies with acerbic wit and an eye that is not only jaundiced but in florid hepatic failure. For example, in the chapter "Ten Diseases You Were Better Off Not Knowing About," they describe lethal midline granuloma as a rare disease "that is every bit as bad as it sounds, maybe worse. It is so unpleasant that we would rather not go into details . . ." The authors take great delight in informing the public of the horrors of rare but lethal diseases, doing so in a style that combines a highly trained medical background with a taste of the macabre. The 11 chapters have titles such as "Common Complaints and the Worst Possible Diseases They Could Represent" and "Life-Threatening Infections You Can Catch From Your Pets." In the latter, for example, they admonish that one way to avoid bubonic plague is to remember "that a rabbit is not a toy. It is a shy, graceful creature that would like to see you swell up and die."

But one question remains: Is this book funny? I believe so. Although sophomoric at times, it will have many of us laughing out loud. As a form of relief from the daily tragedies physicians face, it could do much for our mental hygiene and, as all good works of satire should, it forces us to look at how we practice our art. It is true that some physicians might find this book vulgar and inflammatory. But in view of its cover (the authors are wearing Groucho Marx disguises) it seems unlikely that the easily offended would buy this book in the first place.

The unresolved issue is whether or not a lay person will find this book to be funny. I was disturbed at times by the brutality of the revelations. Is this just more food for worry? Will the average reader be amused or, conversely, terrified by learning that the differential diagnosis of "the sniffles" includes leprosy, syphilis and Wegener's granulomatosis? Yet, the public continues to clamor for books about health. It is only to be expected that satirically striking ones such as this will surface as if to say "OK, folks, you asked for it and now you are going to get it!" Like a pie in the face, how funny it is may depend on which end of the pie one is on.

If laughter is the best medicine, this book will not go down in history as the most efficacious incarnation of that drug. Nonetheless, it is well worth the money for the invigorating effect of a few good chuckles.

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ANKLE INJURIES—Isadore G. Yablon, MD, Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery, Boston University School of Medicine, Boston; David Segal, MD, Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery, Boston University School of Medicine, and Director, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Boston City Hospital, Boston, and Robert E. Leach, MD, Professor and Chairman, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Boston University School of Medicine, Boston. Churchill Livingstone, Inc., 1560 Broadway, New York, NY 10036, 1983. 264 pages, \$15.00.

This excellent book is a welcome addition to the orthopedic literature. The authors have addressed a wide variety of ankle trauma, including ligamentous injury, growth plate injury and fractures, both experimentally and clinically. The stated bias

favors an operative approach to fractures, which the authors feel will give more predictable, satisfactory long-term results.

Particularly helpful are the chapters pertaining to initial evaluation, radiographic assessment, bimalleolar, talar dome and plafond fractures, growth plate and ligamentous injuries. The clinical results are often backed by experimental data, which offer a rationale for an approach to treatment. The authors state the problem and support their own treatment preferences by cadaveric and biomechanical studies. The information is presented in a precise and readable format. The bibliography is excellent and serves as a valuable resource.

The book is lacking in a detailed discussion of closed means of treatment for ankle fractures. Certainly there will be times when this form of treatment will be the treatment of choice. More discussion pertaining to chronic ankle pain and instability would have been a useful addition. There is no mention of the treatment problem of the patient who presents with osteopenia associated with an ankle fracture.

The book has a broad appeal. It will be useful to any clinician treating patients with ankle injuries. Orthopedic residents in particular, and family practitioners, emergency room physicians and medical students also should find it a fine reference.

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SURGERY OF THE KNEE—Edited by John N. Insall, MD, Professor of Orthopedic Surgery, Cornell University Medical Center; Attending Orthopedic Surgeon, The Hospital for Special Surgery and The New York Hospital; Chief of the Knee Service, The Hospital for Special Surgery, New York, and Honorary Consultant Surgeon, The London Hospital, London. Churchill Livingstone, Inc., 1560 Broadway, New York, NY 10036, 1984. 807 pages, \$95.00.

This is an excellent basic text for general orthopedists interested in the knee. Its size and detail preclude it being anything other than a reference source for general physicians.

The text is logically organized with anatomy, biomechanics, surgical approaches and then physical and radiographic workup of the knee following. One chapter leads very well into another; however, if a reader is interested in just one aspect of the knee each chapter stands well on its own merit. There is a logical flow to the book that is often missing in multiauthored texts, especially in texts that have such well-known and authoritative coauthors.

The strength of this book lies in Dr John Insall's (the principal author) position in the field of development of reconstructive surgery for the knee. The chapters related to late reconstruction of the adult knee are extremely well done. The weakness of the book is acknowledged in the author's preface and it principally relates to the sections on arthroscopy and reconstruction after athletic-type injuries. In the overall area of knee surgery today, arthroscopy and ligament reconstructive surgery occupy well over half of a general orthopedist's knee practice but occupy less than an eighth of the pages in this text. The author recognizes this in his preface and explains the lack of detail in these two areas on their recent emergence and lack of well-documented studies for operative procedures and techniques currently being employed. Overall, this is an excellent text and is mandatory reading for anyone doing knee surgery, especially adult late reconstructive procedures such as osteotomy and total knee arthroplasty.

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